

# THE ARMENIAN PEOPLE FROM ANCIENT TO MODERN TIMES

VOLUME II

Foreign Dominion to Statehood:  
The Fifteenth Century  
to the Twentieth Century

Edited by Richard G. Hovannisian  
*Professor of Armenian and Near Eastern History*  
*University of California, Los Angeles*

St. Martin's Press  
New York



THE ARMENIAN PEOPLE FROM ANCIENT TO MODERN TIMES, VOLUME II  
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For information, address St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New  
York, N.Y. 10010.  
ISBN 0-312-10169-4

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

The Armenian people from ancient to modern times / edited by Richard  
G. Hovannisian.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Contents : v. 1. The dynastic periods—from antiquity to the  
fourteenth century — v. 2 Foreign dominion to statehood—the  
fifteenth century to the twentieth century.

ISBN 0-312-10169-4 (v. 1). — ISBN 0-312-10168-6 (v. 2)

1. Armenia—History. 2. Armenians—History. I Hovannisian,  
Richard G.

DS175.A715 1997

956.62—dc21

97-5310

CIP

Design by Acme Art, Inc.

First edition: September, 1997

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# THE ARMENIAN QUESTION IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE, 1876–1914

Richard G. Hovannisian

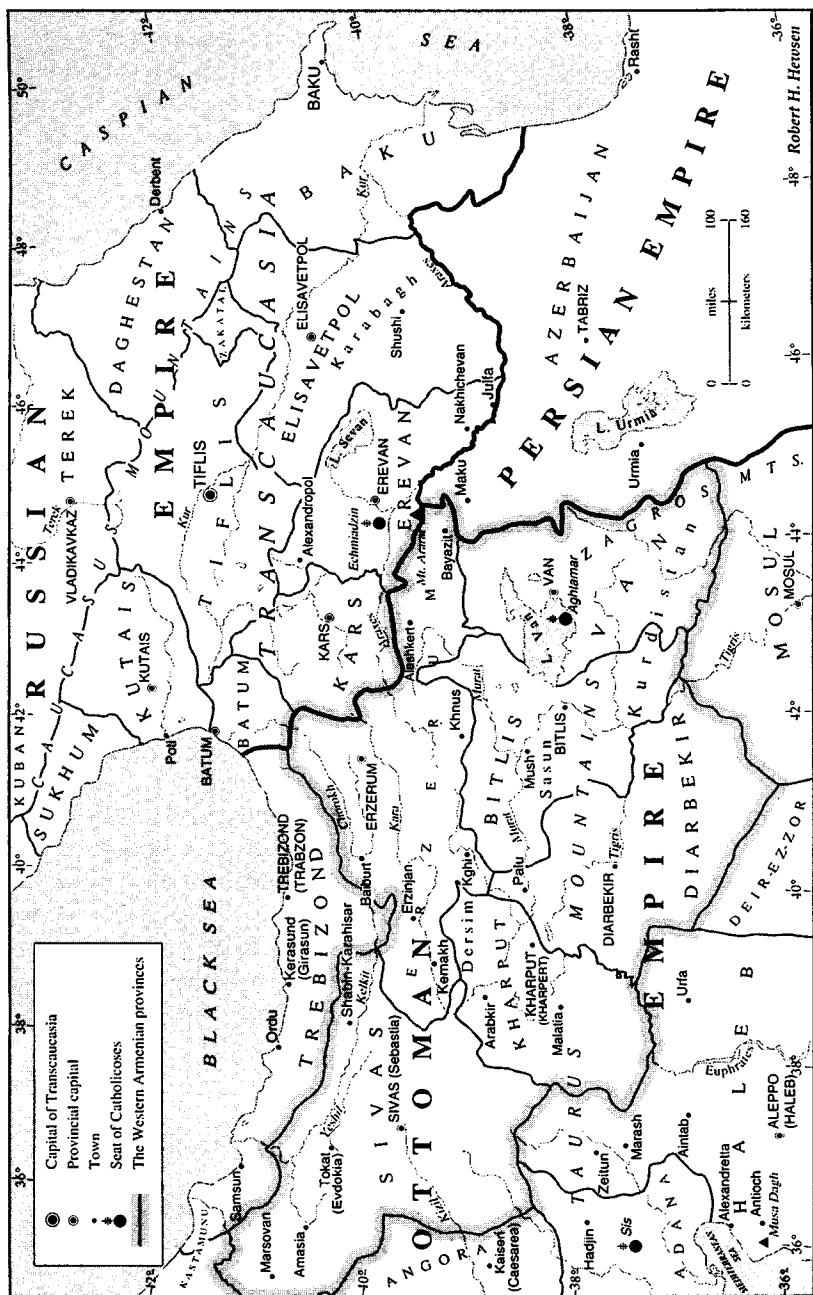
**T**he plight of the Armenian population and its struggle for civil rights and administrative reforms became known as the Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire. That question first found entry into the chambers of international diplomacy in 1878 as the result of the empire's military reverses and internal decay. The tanzimat reforms of the preceding decades proved to be an inadequate response to the breakdown of traditional social, economic, and political relations. They introduced the principle of equality, but in fact remained largely unimplemented and only aroused the suspicions and resentment of Muslim elements whose customary superiority was threatened by the reforms. The confusing and uneven application of the tanzimat measures actually aggravated the situation by weakening the quasi-protection afforded subject groups in semifeudal societies without instituting a new system for safeguarding life and property.

Most Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were peasants, notwithstanding Western stereotypes of shrewd and crafty Armenian merchants with whom Europeans were most in contact. During the nineteenth

century, shifting political and economic relationships contributed to a sharp rise in dispossessed, landless Armenian peasants and the condemnation of many to a marginal existence in squalid urban slums. During the patriarchal reign of Archbishop Mkrtich Khrimian (1869-1873), details of the affliction of the provincial Armenians were gathered and publicized. A picture of unjust and exorbitant taxation, corrupt and oppressive administration, inadmissibility of Christian testimony in Muslim courts of law, and depredations by nomadic Kurdish and other tribal elements was clearly etched in these reports.

At the same time that conditions for most Armenians were deteriorating, national self-awareness was on the rise. Hundreds of Ottoman Armenian youth, sons of the privileged classes, were returning from study in the West, imbued with the social and political philosophies of the age of romanticism and revolt. This enthusiastic elite engaged in journalism, education, and literary criticism, breaking the restrictive bonds of the Armenian classical language to write in the vernacular—the utilitarian language. The authors and poets exhorted their people to recover their national collective memory and honor, so long tarnished and forgotten. Stimulated by American and other foreign missionary institutions in the Near East, a network of Armenian schools and newspapers gradually spread from Constantinople and Smyrna to Cilicia and eventually to the towns and villages of the eastern provinces—Turkish (Western) Armenia.

It was this dual development, the conscious Armenian demand for individual and collective security of life and property on the one hand and the burgeoning insecurity of both life and property on the other, that gave rise to the Armenian question as a part of the larger Eastern question. There were certain peculiarities to the Armenian Question. Most other Christian subject peoples lived in the Balkans and were in the process of separation from the Ottoman Empire. The Arab Muslim provinces had never been colonized significantly by Turkic tribes, and by and large they maintained an autonomous existence. But the two to three million Armenians of the Ottoman Empire lived in every province. There were far more Armenians in Constantinople than in any city on the Armenian plateau. Armenians also made up a large proportion of the population of Cilicia and played a vital role in the crafts and trades of western Anatolia. It was true that most Armenians of the Ottoman Empire continued to live on the lands of their historic ancient and medieval kingdoms on the great highland plateau in the east. Yet even there they were no longer predominant. Over the centuries Turkic and



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Kurdish peoples had migrated into the area and when combined outnumbered the Armenians. The Muslim elements were disparate from racial, sectarian, social, and economic points of view, yet the Ottoman administration lumped them together into the Muslim *millet* and eventually counterposed them to the Armenians for political reasons. Hence, Armenians were in some places a plurality, but only in a few districts were they an absolute majority in the provinces known as Turkish or Western Armenia.

The demographic distribution of the Armenian population had a significant effect on the formulation of Armenian political thought. Armenian petitions to the Sublime Porte repeatedly requested action against corrupt officials and predatory tribes and the chronic instances of abduction, pillage, and extortion. They sought a system of direct taxation, civil justice, and local representation. Thus, at the time that Greeks, Serbians, Romanians, Bulgarians, and others were gaining autonomy and even independence, Armenian supplications modestly asked for security and good government. Except for the mountaineers of Zeitun and a few other isolated enclaves, the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire were not willing or able to take up arms to defend themselves. Consequently they received little attention from the European states when those powers pressured the Ottoman government to make major concessions to the rebellious Balkan peoples.

By the time the Western Armenians began to articulate their own programs for political, social, and economic reforms, the Ottoman Empire was entrenched in a period of reaction. Sultan Abdul-Hamid II (1878-1909) was driven to paranoia by the specter of the final partition and dissolution of his realm and viewed Armenian agitation as treachery. Each Armenian appeal aroused more antagonism and suspicion. And each halfhearted European attempt at intercession only deepened the paranoia. If the Armenians were to follow the example of the Balkan Christians, there might be nothing left of the empire except a truncated Turkish state in western Anatolia.

### Internationalization of the Armenian Question

Revolts by Balkan Christians in 1875 and severe acts of Turkish retribution, including the massacre of the men, women, and children of several Bulgarian villages, created an uproar in the liberal press of Europe. Even the British Conservatives, headed by Benjamin Disraeli

(Lord Beaconsfield), could not remain immune to public pressure. When the first reports of massacre reached London, Prime Minister Disraeli tried to forestall action, upholding the Conservative traditional policy of containing the Russian Empire and furthering British political and economic interests by limiting the partition and slowing the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The Suez Canal had only recently been opened, redoubling British interest in the eastern Mediterranean as a lifeline to India. Yet Disraeli could not withstand the rising tide of criticism and tried to deal with the crisis by proposing a conference in Constantinople of the ambassadors of the European powers—Great Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy—to mediate and find a way to resolve the most serious grievances of the Balkan Christians.

The conference finally convened in December 1876, but Sultan Abdul-Hamid maneuvered to undercut the Europeans by promulgating a constitution that had been drafted by Midhat Pasha, Grigor Otian (Krikor Odian), and other sincere advocates of reform. The constitution provided for the separation of legislative, executive, and judicial powers and guaranteed civil rights, equality of all citizens before the law, religious freedom, and security of life and property. Had the sultan been as sincere in implementing the constitution, he could have eliminated the major grievances of the subject nationalities, Armenians included. But proclamation of the constitution forced adjournment of the conference of ambassadors and, in fact, left matters even worse in the Balkans. Sultan Abdul-Hamid, having warded off European intervention, soon prorogued the constitution and the parliament for which it had provided.

The Balkan crisis heightened Russo-Turkish tensions until April 1877, when the Russians, invoking a clause of a previous treaty, crossed the frontier into the Romanian principality of Moldavia, evoking a declaration of war from Abdul-Hamid. The Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 was fought in the Balkans and on the Armenian plateau. The dominant circles of the Armenian *millet* traditionally had shared Turkish suspicions of Russia and feared the implications of a regime committed to "Autocracy, Orthodoxy, and [Russian] Nationality." Patriarch Nerses Varzhapetian issued a pastoral letter calling on his people to work and pray for the victory of Ottoman arms. Yet for the Armenian population in the border regions of Alashkert, Bayazit (Bayazed), Mush, and Van, Russia seemed to offer the only hope of deliverance from the terrible anarchic conditions. This view was strengthened when, after the Russian armies began to advance on the great fortress city of Kars, Kurdish tribal levies and irregulars (*bashibazouk*) looted and burned Armenian vil-

lages in that district as well as in Alashkert and Bayazit. Hence, when the Russian armies, led by Russian Armenian generals M. T. Loris-Melikov, A. A. Gusakov, and I. I. Lazarev, captured Kars in November 1877 and then the fortress of Erzerum three months later, they were welcomed by many Armenians as liberators.

At the end of 1877, the Russian armies in the Balkans, commanded by the tsar's brother, Grand Duke Nicholas, overcame stiff Turkish resistance at Plevna and advanced to Adrianople (Edirne), the gateway to Constantinople. There, in January 1878, the Turkish command sued for an armistice and preliminary negotiations for peace began. By then even Patriarch Nerses and the Armenian National Assembly had put aside their Russophobia to instruct the Armenian primate of Adrianople to petition the grand duke to include in the peace treaty specific provisions for the self-administration of the Armenian provinces. The massacre and plunder of scores of Armenian villages in the east by Kurdish and Circassian bands, financed by the regular Turkish army, influenced the patriarchal circles to seek Russian intercession through the good offices of the pan-Slavist prewar Russian ambassador to Constantinople, Count I. I. Ignatiev. The Armenians were encouraged by the grand duke's sympathy and a draft clause relating to self-government of the Armenian provinces, but soon the armistice collapsed and the Russians marched to San Stefano on the outskirts of the Ottoman capital.

The Russian offensive set off international war jitters, as Disraeli's government sent a naval squadron to the Dardanelles to prevent Russian occupation of Constantinople. Conflict was averted by the Russo-Turkish peace treaty of San Stefano, signed on March 3, 1878. The treaty virtually ended Ottoman hegemony over the Balkans, as Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania, following the previous example of Greece, were granted independence, and a large Bulgarian state with an outlet on the Aegean Sea was made autonomous. On the Caucasus front, Russia was awarded the districts of Batum, Ardahan, Kars, Alashkert, and Bayazit, whereas the rest of the occupied territories of Western Armenia were to be returned to the sultan. Armenian leaders were disappointed that there was no provision for Armenian self-administration. Their only compensation was article 16, which made Russian withdrawal conditional:

As the evacuation of the Russian troops of the territory which they occupy in Armenia, and which is to be restored to Turkey, might give rise to conflicts and complications detrimental to the maintenance of



good relations between the two countries, the Sublime Porte engages to carry into effect, without further delay, the improvements and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by Armenians, and to guarantee their security from Kurds and Circassians. (Great Britain, 1878; Hertslet, 1891, p. 2686)

General Loris-Melikov would stand firm in Erzerum until Tsar Alexander II was satisfied that there were adequate guarantees for the security of the Christian population.

Receipt of the treaty terms in London immediately put Prime Minister Disraeli and Foreign Secretary Robert Salisbury into action. Salisbury denounced the treaty as a surrender of the Turkish Armenian strongholds to Russia and with them the lucrative overland trade route from Trebizond over Alashkert and Bayazit to Persia and beyond. Enlisting the support of Austria-Hungary, which was also deeply concerned about the spread of Russian influence in the Balkans, the British now demanded a European congress to conclude an equitable Eastern settlement. Tsar Alexander II, already beset by grievous internal crises, could not risk hostilities with a major European power and acquiesced in the British demand. With German chancellor Otto von Bismarck issuing the invitations as the "honest broker," plenipotentiaries of the European powers gathered for the Berlin Congress in June 1878.

When Patriarch Nerses and the Armenian National Assembly learned of these developments, they were not discouraged. On the contrary, it was the reluctant Russian orientation that had brought them disappointment, and they now hoped that a British orientation would lead to a measure of self-government. As the British knew that the Armenians did not seek separation from the Ottoman Empire, they might sponsor a program of good government and of Armenian self-administration to steady the empire. With this objective, a delegation led by former patriarch Mkrtych Khrimian set out for the European capitals to explain the Armenian case to the diplomats who would proceed to Berlin. Using the administrative statute of Lebanon as a model, the Armenians asked that the eastern provinces be granted a Christian governor, civil courts, local self-administration, mixed Christian-Muslim militias, suffrage for all male taxpayers, and the use of most tax revenues for local needs. Lord Salisbury received the delegation politely but without making any commitments, and the Armenians received similar receptions in Paris and Berlin.

To the bitter disappointment of Khrimian "Hairik" (the endearing word for "father") and his associates, no one took note of the Armenian delegation outside the conference hall. Within, Salisbury aggressively pushed the British policy of eliminating the most threatening aspects of the San Stefano treaty. Serbia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria were cut back in size, Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as most of the land set aside for Bulgaria were returned to the sultan. On the Caucasus front, the districts of Alashkert and Bayazit were also restored to Abdul-Hamid, thus keeping the main overland trade route out of Russian control. There was no discussion of Armenian self-administration, and the question of reforms, instead of falling to Russian supervision, was to become the responsibility of the European powers collectively. In place of San Stefano's article 16, Berlin's article 61 read:

The Sublime Porte undertakes to carry out, without further delay, the improvements and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by Armenians, and to guarantee their security against the Circassians and Kurds.

It will periodically make known the steps taken to this effect to the powers, who will superintend their application. (Great Britain, 1878; Hertslet, 1891, p. 2796)

In the long run, the conversion of article 16 to 61 was succinctly stated by the Duke of Argyll: "What was everybody's business was nobody's business" (Campbell, 1896, p. 74). On July 13, 1878, the day that the treaty was signed, Archbishop Khrimian wrote the plenipotentiaries that his delegation regretted that its legitimate and moderate demands had been ignored. The Armenian nation had never been the instrument of a foreign power and, although more oppressed than any other Christian people, had caused no trouble to the Ottoman government. It had hoped to find the same protection afforded to other Christian nations, especially as it was "devoid of all political ambition." The protest concluded:

The Armenians have just realised that they have been deceived, that their rights have not been recognised, because they have been pacific. . . .

The Armenian delegation is going to return to the east, taking this lesson with it. It declares nevertheless that the Armenian people will never cease from crying out until Europe gives its legitimate demands satisfaction. (Walker, 1980, p. 170)

Khrimian Hairik repeated the message shortly after returning to Constantinople. There in the Armenian cathedral in the Kum Kapu quarter, he preached a memorable sermon filled with metaphors. All the big and little powers had gathered in Europe, he said, to partake of the "dish of liberty." The Balkan peoples had come to Berlin with their metal spoons and ate of the tasty *herisa* stew. But the Armenians had only paper petitions, and when they timidly placed their paper spoon into the *herisa*, the paper dissolved and the Armenians received nothing. Despite Khrimian's generally conservative disposition, his message came to be regarded by many as a revolutionary call to forge an "iron spoon" through self-reliance and self-defense (Nalbandian, 1963, pp. 28-29).

Both Austria-Hungary and Great Britain profited from their diplomatic support of the Ottoman Empire. Austria was given the right to administer in the name of the sultan the districts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This was a major affront to Serbian nationalists and, after Austria simply annexed both districts in 1908, led to the assassination of the Austrian heir-apparent and the outbreak of World War I. Before the Berlin Congress opened, Great Britain already had its reward. In a secret agreement with the Sublime Porte, the British were given a long-term "lease" over the island of Cyprus, with its strategic coaling stations due north of the Suez Canal. In return, Great Britain pledged itself to prevent any further Russian encroachments in the Asiatic provinces of the Ottoman Empire and "to join his imperial majesty the sultan in defending them by force of arms." The sultan, for his part, pledged to introduce "necessary reforms" to improve the administration and protect the Christian and other subjects in those provinces (Walker, 1980, p. 114; Hertslet, 1891, pp. 2722-33). The British thus required reforms unilaterally through the Cyprus convention and collectively through the Congress of Berlin. In the eastern provinces, meanwhile, horrified Armenians witnessed the evacuation of General Loris-Melikov's divisions. As had been the case during the Russian withdrawal from Erzerum in 1829, thousands of native Armenians departed with the tsarist armies in 1878 to settle in Transcaucasia.

Despite the setback caused by the Treaty of Berlin, Armenian leaders had not lost hope. Great Britain was regarded as the most advanced and most civilized country in the world and could be trusted to supervise Armenian reforms in a far more enlightened manner than Russia, whose attitude toward the Armenians, their church and aspirations, was suspect. In addressing the Armenian National Assembly, Patriarch Nerses Varzhapetian declared that he had faith that the needed

reforms would evolve from article 61. As the chief spokesman of the Ottoman Armenians, the patriarch swore fidelity to the sultan and emphasized that efforts to surmount Armenian misfortunes would be made within the framework of the beloved Ottoman homeland. At a time when several of the Balkan nationalities had already won complete independence, the Armenians still shunned any hint of separatism.

The Armenian Question was internationalized by the Treaty of Berlin, but the Armenians gained no advantage from that new status. On the contrary, Kurdish and Circassian tribesmen spread havoc over the eastern provinces, harshly striking those districts from which the Russian armies had just withdrawn. Neither the petitions of the patriarch nor the posting of additional British consuls in Western Armenia helped to alleviate the situation. The consular reports detailed the daily occurrences of bribery, extortion, abduction, and murder and described the courts of justice as a farce and the police and gendarmeries as a scourge.

For three years, until 1881, the European powers, outwardly cooperating under the joint responsibility of article 61, issued collective and identic notes reminding the Sublime Porte of its obligations. But in 1881 Germany, seconded by Austria-Hungary, refused to act in concert. In the same year Tsar Alexander II was assassinated; his son, Alexander III, quickly initiated a period of reaction during which the Russian Armenians, along with other minorities, suffered severe discrimination and the St. Petersburg government dropped any pretense of concern for the Turkish Armenians. In Great Britain, William Gladstone had returned to office, dislodging Disraeli, but the British Liberals were no more successful in moving the sultan to effective reforms than the Conservatives had been. Thus the European powers, already deeply engaged in the scramble for empire in Africa and the Far East, shelved the Armenian Question for fifteen years.

### The Armenian Revolutionary Movement

Feeling abandoned and betrayed, a growing number of Armenians began to espouse extralegal means to achieve what they now regarded as the natural rights of man. They came to believe that, like the Balkan Christians, the Armenian people would have to organize, even take arms, to achieve their goals. Small, locally based groups emerged at Van, Erzerum, and other localities, with the members reading clandestine literature and engaging in target practice. The rudimentary programs of

these groups called for defending the honor of the nation against those who violated the people, their religion and culture. The Pashtpan Hai-reniats (Defense of the Fatherland) society, formed in Erzerum in 1881, adopted the slogan "Liberty or Death," and advocated Armenian self-defense. The arrest of most of its members the next year suppressed the movement, but the fact that so many young people had participated in the society was a source of inspiration to like-minded Armenians everywhere, memorialized in the patriotic song "A Sound Reverberated from the Armenian Mountains of Erzerum." The appearance of societies such as the Pashtpan Hai-reniats reflected the growing chasm between fathers and sons, as the youth were no longer willing to accept their parents' patience, endurance, and even fatalism in the face of gross violations of fundamental human rights. It was the generation of the sons that took to heart the metaphor of Khrimian Hairik's "iron spoon."

The Armenakan society, organized in 1885 at Van, is generally considered the first Armenian political party, although its program and area of activity was limited. The inspiration of Mkrtich Portukalian, an erudite educator, organizer, and proponent of self-defense who had propagated his views as teacher and head master in Van, the party took its name from *Armenia*, the newspaper that Portukalian founded in Marseilles after his expulsion from the Ottoman Empire that same year. The Armenakan platform called for Armenian self-determination, to be achieved through revolutionary means but coming after a long period of preparation through enlightenment, propaganda, organization, and military training. The party did not favor open agitation or demonstrations and did not include Armenian independence even as a long-range objective. Their revolutionary rhetoric notwithstanding, the Armenakans continued to seek reforms through peaceful means and European intervention, emphasizing that the general Armenian movement should become manifest at a time of renewed international interest in the Armenian question. Education and enlightenment were essential prerequisites to Armenian self-government. What made the party revolutionary, therefore, was its advocacy of self-reliance and armed resistance against state terror.

The Armenakan society gained some adherents in Constantinople, Trebizond, Salmast in northern Persia, and elsewhere, but by and large it drew its membership and concentrated its activities at Van. Armenakan youth defended Armenian villages from raids and organized acts of retribution. In 1896, when massacre and plunder had enveloped the Armenian plateau, Armenakan detachments, together with those of

the Hnchakists and Dashnakists, took arms to defend their city. Subsequently, most Armenakans integrated into the larger revolutionary organizations or else, through stages, moved toward liberal, evolutionary programs, such as that adopted by the Constitutional Democrat (Sahmanadir Ramkavar) party, which was organized in Cairo in 1908.

The Hnchakian Revolutionary Party, subsequently renamed the Social Democrat Hnchakian Party, became the first Armenian party with a national and international structure and detailed political program. Organized in Geneva in 1887 by Maro Vardanian, her fiancé Avetis Nazarbekian, and several other Russian Armenian intellectuals who had been influenced both by Russian populism and by Marxism, the party took its name from its newspaper, *Hnchak* (Bell), clearly reminiscent of Alexander Herzen's Russian-language *Kolokol* (Bell). The short-range goal of the Hnchakists was the emancipation of Turkish (Western) Armenia; the long-range objective was creation of an independent socialist state within the framework of a socialist world order.

Concentrating on the short-range platform, the Hnchakist press detailed the impoverishment and repression in the Ottoman Armenian provinces. The only real solution, therefore, was the liberation of Western Armenia through revolution. In preparation for the uprising, the Hnchakian Party would emphasize education, self-defense, and the revolutionary tactics of agitation and terror against external oppressors and internal informers and collaborators. In view of the fact that the land of historic Armenia was now shared by non-Armenian elements, efforts should be made to draw them into a common struggle against state terror. Following the emancipation of Western Armenia, a popularly elected legislative body would guarantee complete freedom of press, speech, assembly, and conscience and the right to hold office regardless of wealth or position. The government would be based on broad provincial and communal initiative.

In stressing self-sufficiency, the Hnchakists still regarded European intervention as an important element in winning independence, but they also cautioned against the danger of exchanging Turkish misrule for that of the imperialist powers. The only sure way to prevent such an eventuality was realization of the long-range goal of also emancipating Russian Armenia and Persian Armenia and bringing a united socialist state into a world socialist order. While adhering to Marxist tenets, the Hnchakists saw no serious contradiction between patriotism and socialism or between nationalism and internationalism. Like most other Marxist societies, the Hnchakists adopted a tight-knit, centralized struc-

ture. The party's central committee and organ remained in Geneva, its clandestine literature finding fertile soil among the discontented Armenian youth of the Ottoman and Russian empires. Field workers soon established branches in Constantinople, Cilicia, Anatolia, Western Armenia, Transcaucasia, and in the Armenian communities of the Balkans, the United States, and elsewhere.

As the Hnchakian Revolutionary Party began to infiltrate the Ottoman Empire, Armenian intellectuals in the Russian Empire were active both in antigovernmental Russian movements and in separate Armenian societies. It was a time of great ferment, especially since the Eastern Armenians had been subjected to the discriminatory measures of Tsar Alexander III. The closure of Armenian schools and other acts of repression by the tsarist regime caused some Armenian internationalists to focus attention on the particular woes of their own people. In that process, they came to the realization that their own tribulations were dwarfed by those of the Western Armenians. Implementation of the reforms foreseen in the Treaty of Berlin and training for self-defense became a part of the credo of the Eastern Armenian intellectuals who had passed through the Russian *Zemlia i Volia* (Land and Will) and *Narodnaia Volia* (People's Will) movements. Tiflis, the cultural, economic, and political center of the Russian Armenians, abounded with legal, semilegal, and illegal societies, the more militant of which planned to organize guerrilla bands and have them slip across the frontier into Western Armenia. There was an insatiable thirst for firsthand accounts of what was transpiring in the *erkir* (homeland), as the Western Armenian provinces came to be known.

The proliferation of many small groups of both socialist and non-socialist orientations detracted from effective, coordinated action and created the need for a unifying umbrella organization. It was out of that need that the Federation of Armenian Revolutionaries (*Hai Heghapokhakanneri Dashnaksutun*) took form at Tiflis in the summer of 1890. The primary organizers, Kristapor Mikayelian, Simon Zavian, and Stepan Zorian (Rostom), were imbued with socialist ideologies, yet in order to form the broadest possible coalition they avoided explicit use of the term and managed to persuade many socialists that the goal of Armenian "economic and political freedom" was founded on socialist precepts. Hnchakist representatives also agreed to enter the federation, but their party soon went its separate way because of insufficient emphasis on socialism by the *Dashnaksutun* and, as was common in the revolutionary movement, because of strong clashes of personality.

By the time of the first party congress and adoption of a platform in 1892, the organization had been recast and consolidated as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation or Hai Heghapokhakan Dashnaktsutiun. Its program resembled that of the Hnchakists to the degree that it focused on the emancipation of Western Armenia and included planks on security of life and labor; freedom of speech, press, and assembly; redistribution of land to those who worked it; equality of all nationalities before the law; establishment of universal military service in place of the military exemption fee; compulsory education; and a progressive system of taxation. Unlike the Hnchakists, however, the Dashnaktsutiun adhered to the Russian populist and Social Revolutionary view of peasant communes containing the seeds of the new society. Rejecting the Marxist scheme of historical development that necessitated capitalistic exploitation and dehumanization as a precursor to revolution and the triumph of socialism, the Armenian Dashnakists and Russian Social Revolutionaries believed that it was possible to avoid the worst abuses of advanced capitalism, and through the existing peasant communes, to pass directly from a semifeudal to an egalitarian society.

The immediate objective of the Dashnaktsutiun was the economic and political freedom of Western Armenia. Measures would be taken to raise the revolutionary morale of the people, to organize armed units to bond with the peasant masses, and to train the Armenians in self-defense. During the period of time needed to spread these ideas and prepare for the armed struggle, the Dashnaktsutiun would battle all exploiters, including corrupt officials, traitors, and usurers. Like the Hnchakian party, the Dashnaktsutiun accepted the Narodnaia Volia's reliance on terroristic measures against the enemies of the people. Yet the Dashnaktsutiun remained aloof from the Hnchakist tactic of mass demonstrations. The most fundamental difference between the two parties, however, was that the Hnchakists alone called for the complete separation and independence of Western Armenia; the Dashnakist program was limited to freedom and autonomy within the framework of the Ottoman Empire. The Dashnakist organ, *Droshak* (Banner), was emphatic in pointing out that the terms "freedom" and "independence" were not synonymous. Under the prevailing circumstances, independence was not a realistic objective. Taking into consideration the dispersal of the Armenian people, the party adopted a decentralized structure, vesting in the regional committees flexible latitude according to local conditions and needs. It was not until renewed anti-Armenian measures in the Russian Empire beginning in 1903 that the Dashnaktsutiun was



radicalized sufficiently to adopt an explicitly socialist platform and become a member of the Second Socialist International in 1907. And it was not until 1919 that the party revised its program to bring it into conformity with the entirely unplanned but nonetheless *de facto* existence of an independent Armenian republic.

The Armenian revolutionary societies faced enormous obstacles. They opposed an imperial regime with extensive military and bureaucratic means of repression. Matters were made even worse in 1891 when Sultan Abdul-Hamid brought frequently rebellious Kurdish elements under official auspices by providing them money, uniforms, and officers and organizing them into irregular cavalry units, ostensibly to patrol the frontiers much like Russian Cossacks, but in reality to keep the Armenians in check. Armenian resistance to the so-called Hamidiye cavalry units could now be regarded as insubordination and insurrection against the state and the sultan.

No less weighty than the instruments of repression was the centuries-long conditioning of the Armenian people to second-class, inferior status under foreign domination. Hence, although the vast majority of Armenians groaned under the breakdown of law and order and the arbitrariness of the sultan's official and unofficial representatives, most were afraid that resistance and acts of defiance would lead to massive retaliation and even greater suffering. Internally, revolutionary ideologies alarmed not only those who feared retribution but also and especially those of the Armenian privileged classes who saw in the militant, socialist-oriented revolutionary platforms frightful threats to their own position and well-being. The anticlericalism of many revolutionary intellectuals posed an ominous challenge to the traditional role of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the governance of the Armenian *millet* in the Ottoman Empire.

Adherents of the new revolutionary societies realized that the campaign to free the Armenian people from a servile mentality would be a lengthy process. Their programs all emphasized education, enlightenment, propaganda, and preparation. To join a revolutionary society required unusual commitment in view of the possibility of punishment by death. Even at the height of their popularity, the secret societies and their armed bands could attract only a relatively small following of active members and even fewer who were willing to abandon home and family in exchange for the abnegation and commitment required of the freedom fighter, the *fedayi*. Still, a significant number of young people gave up all hope in legal, peaceful methods of change and instead moved toward the

idealistic image of a free, autonomous, even independent, Armenia. The endurance of the fathers was now matched by the impatience of the sons.

### Demonstration and Revolt

Demonstration, confrontation, revolt, and massacre characterized the decade of the 1890s (Walker, 1980, pp. 131-36; Nalbandian, 1963, pp. 118-28). The newly formed Armenian revolutionary societies began to agitate for reforms and renewed European attention to the Armenian question. The Hnchakist Party in particular utilized the tactic of mass demonstration to hasten the process. The first encounter occurred in Erzerum in June 1890, when Turkish authorities combed the Armenian cathedral and the Sanasarian secondary academy in search of weapons. Even though no arms were discovered, an aroused Turkish mob attacked Armenian shops and homes a few days later. Then, when two hundred angry Armenian youths gathered in the churchyard to draw up a petition of protest, they refused to disperse upon order of the authorities. Shots were fired, a melee ensued, and a number of protesters were killed or wounded. It was presumed that the Hnchakists were responsible for this first significant confrontation and open act of Armenian defiance.

A month later blood was again shed, this time outside the Armenian Patriarchate in the Kum Kapu quarter of Constantinople. Several Hnchakists, led by Harutiun Djangulian, Mihran Damadian, and Hambartsum Boyajian (Murad), interrupted the saying of mass to read a manifesto of demands and to denounce the indifference of Patriarch Khoren Ashegian and the Armenian National Assembly. They forced the terrified patriarch to join in a procession to the Yildiz palace to deliver the manifesto of grievances to Sultan Abdul-Hamid and to demand implementation of article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin. Even as the procession was organizing, police and soldiers surrounded the demonstrators. Again a skirmish ensued. Shots were fired, several persons, including at least one Turkish policeman, were killed, and many lay bloodied. The Kum Kapu encounter, an intentional act of agitation, alarmed both the Turkish sultan and the Armenian patriarch. On the other hand, the confrontation had shown that in repressive societies even peaceful demonstrations would end in violence. That conclusion was tested and proved true time and again. And although no tangible improvements resulted from the Kum Kapu affair, the Hnchakist press extolled the courage shown and the awakening in progress.

The Hnchakists continued to organize demonstrations in 1891 and 1892, none of them so dramatic as Kum Kapu, and growing numbers of intellectuals and youthful nationalists joined or secretly supported the clandestine organization. Then, in 1893, the Hnchakists were apparently behind the posting of Turkish-language placards (*yafas*) in Yozgat, Amasia, Tokat, Marsovan, and other places in Anatolia, calling upon the Muslim population to rise up against the sultan and his oppressive regime. Again, with no tangible effect upon the intended audience, the act of provocation led to the arrest, imprisonment, torture, and hanging of many actual or suspected members of the Hnchakian Revolutionary Party.

The first real test of revolutionary armed resistance came in the remote mountains of Sasun, due south of the plain of Mush in the province of Bitlis. The Armenians complained of the exactions made by Kurdish notables (*aghas*), who demanded tribute in kind (*hafir*) in return for protection or, perhaps more accurately, for refraining from raids. But even the *hafir* often did not spare the Armenians from the havoc caused by nomadic Kurdish tribes from the Diarbekir region moving to summer pasture. Moreover, as the semifeudal system broke down, government tax collectors arrived to take their share. The impoverishment and plunder made the rugged mountaineers of Sasun receptive to the gospel of resistance preached by Hnchakist intellectual Damadian and intellectual-warrior Murad. Armenians of the Talvorig village cluster took arms to defend themselves against Kurdish raids in the summer of 1893. Damadian was arrested and sent to Constantinople that year, but Murad and his partisans continued to exhort the Sasunites to break the stranglehold of their Kurdish overlords.

In the summer of 1894 both nomadic Kurdish tribes and government tax collectors appeared for their exactions. The Armenians, emboldened by Murad's band, resisted. The surprised Kurdish chieftains and Turkish officials leveled the charge of sedition against Sasun and complained to the governor of Bitlis, Hasan Tahsin, who sent a military expedition to assist the Kurds. For more than a month the Armenians withstood the regulars and irregulars, but with supplies nearly exhausted they agreed to lay down their arms in return for an amnesty and having their grievances heard by the government. The Turkish commander gave his word to honor the conditions, but instead the disarmed population was brutalized. The villages of Shenik and Semal were looted and burned; priests were tortured, murdered, and mutilated; men were bayoneted; women were raped and disemboweled; and children were slashed and smashed. People who had fled to the caves and crevasses of

Mount Andok were hunted down by regulars and irregulars who showed no mercy regardless of age or gender. As many as 3,000 Sasunites perished in the carnage (Walker, 1980, pp. 136-42).

Word of the Sasun massacre spread quickly. The British consuls at Erzerum and Van relayed the available details to Ambassador Philip Currie in Constantinople. Their attempts to inspect the site of the massacre were blocked by officials who claimed the region was unsafe because of a cholera epidemic. The British, who by their insistence on the revision of the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878 were most responsible for the absence of adequate guarantees for the protection of the Armenians, now sharply protested to the Sublime Porte. As missionaries and correspondents broadcast the details of the brutality, the outcry in Europe prompted the British, French, and Russian ambassadors to propose a joint commission of inquiry. Rejecting the suggestion as interference in the internal affairs of the Ottoman state, the Sublime Porte ultimately consented to a compromise that allowed European observers to accompany a governmental commission of inquiry. The hearings were held in Mush in early 1895 in an atmosphere of intimidation. Nonetheless, several Armenian eyewitnesses were courageous enough to testify about the causes and character of the massacres. Not surprisingly, the Turkish commission found that the Armenians had engaged in seditious action that had necessitated pacification by the armed forces. The European observers disagreed:

The absolute ruin of the district can never be regarded a measure proportionate to the punishment even of a revolt; *a fortiori*, in the present case, the only crimes of the Armenians, namely, those of having sheltered or perhaps concealed Murad and his band, of having committed some isolated acts of brigandage against Kurds, or disregarded the authorities, and possibly of having offered some slight resistance to the Imperial troops under circumstances which have not been cleared up, cannot possibly justify the state of misery to which the people and the country have been reduced. An equal responsibility rests on the local authorities, civil and military, for the absence of all measures to prevent a pseudo-revolt . . . or to put a stop later to the strife between the Armenians and the Kurds, and the losses of all kinds which were the consequences. (Great Britain, 1895, 1896)

The Sasun crisis drew the European powers reluctantly back to the Armenian problem after a break of some fifteen years. But the Concert of

Europe no longer acted in unison, as Germany, Austria, and Italy—the future Triple Alliance—showed no interest in pressuring the Sublime Porte, while Russia, outwardly cooperating with Great Britain, was not enthusiastic about supporting Armenian reforms or taking any action that would cause political ferment to spread into Transcaucasia. Nonetheless, in May 1895, after lengthy diplomatic exchanges, the British, French, and Russian ambassadors sent a memorandum to Sultan Abdul-Hamid to remind him once more of his obligations under article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin and to propose a new program of reforms. The project provided that the Armenian provinces of the empire would be consolidated, nomination of governors confirmed by the European powers, Armenian political prisoners granted amnesty, émigrés allowed to return, reparations accorded to victims of Sasun and other affected districts, forced converts to Islam restored to their original faith, a permanent control commission established in Constantinople, and a high commissioner appointed to execute the reform provisions. Moreover, nomadic Kurds were to move only under governmental surveillance and were to be encouraged to adopt a sedentary way of life. The Hamidiye corps, to be disarmed and without uniforms in peacetime, would be attached to regular army units if activated (Great Britain, 1896).

Throughout the summer months, diplomatic exchanges continued, as the Sublime Porte tried to stonewall the program and then to dilute the provisions as much as possible. In London, Lord Salisbury assured the Turkish ambassador that Queen Victoria's government did not seek autonomy or special privileges for the Armenians, only simple justice and equitable treatment. As the negotiations dragged on, the Hnchakists launched another major demonstration. Prior to the Bab Ali (Great Door or Sublime Porte) demonstration in September 1895, the Hnchakists informed the foreign embassies that a peaceful march would be organized to protest the Sasun massacre, political arrests, and terrorization of the Armenian people, which were clearly intended to eliminate the Armenian presence on their historic lands. On September 30 some 2,000 demonstrators set out from the Kum Kapu quarter in the direction of the Sublime Porte with petitions for civil liberties, the right to bear arms, the rehabilitation of Sasun and end to Kurdish migration, the recruitment of Armenians into the police and gendarmerie, and the territorial reorganization of the six Turkish Armenian provinces in conformity with historic, geographic, and ethnographic considerations.

En route to the Bab Ali, the demonstrators were intercepted by the police. Words were exchanged before the police commander slapped a

demonstrator, who swiftly pulled out a revolver and shot the officer. In the fracas that followed, a score of Armenians were killed and a hundred wounded. Then throughout Constantinople Muslim theological students (*softas*) appeared with clubs, reportedly supplied by police agents, and beat to death all Armenians they could find. The massacre continued until October 3, striking especially porters, dockers, and other migrants from the provinces. Thousands of Armenians fled to the protection of their churches and did not venture out for a week. Once again the European ambassadors protested the senseless killings, including the murder of wounded persons in the courtyards of police stations.

It was ironic that while blood was flowing in the streets of the Ottoman capital, Sultan Abdul-Hamid finally accepted a compromise Armenian reform measure, much less comprehensive than the original May plan but nonetheless sufficient to give some hope and to elicit expressions of satisfaction from the European ambassadors. But if the promulgation of reforms was Abdul-Hamid's ostensible response to European pressure, his actual response was to teach both the Armenians and the Europeans a lesson that they would not forget for a long time. The 1895-1896 massacres were at hand.

### The Massacres of 1895-1896

Approximately 100,000 Armenians were killed, hundreds of town quarters and villages were looted and gutted, many villages were forcibly converted to Islam, and a new Armenian exodus resulted from the bloody pogroms that started in October 1895 and did not abate until clubs, axes, and bayonets had again been put to use in Constantinople eleven months later. The twenty-five-year process of eliminating the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire had begun.

No sooner had the Sublime Porte informed the European embassies that the compromise reform measure was being promulgated than the first violent outbreak occurred at Trebizond. A skirmish in the Armenian quarter was followed on October 8 with a bugle call as the signal for a mob that reportedly included uniformed soldiers to go on a rampage of death and destruction. Armenian shops were looted, merchants killed on the spot, homes ransacked. In one day nearly a thousand Armenians lay dead in the city and surrounding villages; survivors were left to face economic ruin. But this was just the beginning. That same month massacres took place at Erzinjan, Erzerum, Gumushkhane,

Baiburt, Urfa, and Bitlis. At Erzerum, the British consul reported that a thousand Armenian businesses had been plundered and several hundred Armenians killed with the direct participation of army regulars. Near Bitlis, the inhabitants of entire villages were compelled to abjure their Christianity and convert to Islam under threat of death. In all these locations, the massacres were preceded by false rumors of an imminent Armenian attack. Muslims were agitated and armed and often during Friday prayers exhorted to take punitive action against the insolent infidels. First the marketplaces were attacked, then the residential quarters. And in nearly every instance, the passivity or complicity of Ottoman officials was established. The pogroms usually lasted from two days to a week before the authorities finally intervened.

The massacres in the very regions where the reform program was supposed to be implemented prompted renewed protests and threats from the British, French, and Russian ambassadors on November 5, but all such diplomatic notes, unsustained by a show of force, elicited declarations of innocence and hurt from the Sublime Porte, which cast the blame for the disorders first and foremost upon the Armenians themselves. The massacres continued in November, at Diarbekir, Sasun, Kharput, Malatia, Arabkir, Sivas, Amasia, Marsovan, Gurun, Kaiseri, and Aintab. Thousands perished in the violence and even larger numbers faced starvation and ruin during the winter of 1895-1896. The next month Urfa was struck a second time with greater ferocity. On December 28 soldiers joined the mob to break through Armenian barricades and kill all in sight. Kerosene was poured over buildings and the quarter put to flames. Some 3,000 men, women, and children crowded into the cathedral, but the troops set fire to the church and shot anyone who tried to escape. The Armenians were learning the price for looking to the West and daring to challenge the theocracy of Sultan Abdul-Hamid. And once again the European powers stood by passively, limiting themselves to joint and identic notes of protest to the Sublime Porte.

The Armenians resisted at a few places. Zeitun took arms in October, capturing the Turkish garrison and officials. A large Turkish expeditionary force surrounded the town and tried to starve it into submission, but the rugged mountaineers endured. The crisis eased only in January 1896, when through European mediation the Zeitunites agreed to lay down their arms and to permit the exile abroad of several Hinchakist agitators in return for a general amnesty, remission of past taxes, and the appointment of a Christian subgovernor. In June the

Armenians of Van also showed that they were prepared to defend themselves as armed detachments of Armenakans, Hnchakists, and Dashnakists joined forces to spare the city the now-established pattern of massacre, plunder, and fire.

The exact number of victims of the pogroms of 1895-1896 will never be known. Before the last acts of violence had passed, Johannes Lepsius, using German and other sources, compiled the following statistics:

People killed	88,243
Towns and villages plundered	2,493
Villages forcibly converted to Islam	456
Churches and monasteries desecrated	649
Churches turned into mosques	328
Victims left destitute	546,000

(Lepsius, 1897, pp. 330-31)

The massacres again aroused world opinion against the "terrible Turk" and led to one of the most audacious and celebrated acts of the Armenian revolutionaries. Although the Armenian Revolutionary Federation had generally refrained from the Hnchakist tactic of public agitation and demonstration, the Dashnaktsutun now authorized a plot to shock the Europeans into action. The scheme involved the capture of the Ottoman Bank, which since the declaration of financial insolvency by the sultan's government in 1882 had been placed under the joint administration of the European creditor states. Located in the Galata quarter of Constantinople, the Ottoman Bank controlled the financial pulse of the empire. On August 26, 1896, twenty-six heavily armed Dashnakists, led by the youth Babgen Siuni, stormed the bank, took hostage the European personnel, and threatened to blow up the money vaults, hostages, and themselves if their terms were not met within forty-eight hours. In notes relayed to Turkish and European officials, the conspirators denounced the state-sponsored massacre of 100,000 Armenians and demanded the immediate implementation of a European-supervised reform measure for the six Western Armenian provinces of Van, Diarbekir, Bitlis, Erzerum, Sivas, and Kharput. The demands of the Dashnakist revolutionaries differed very little from previous reform plans, including civil rights; financial, economic, and judicial improvements; restoration of Armenian goods and properties; return of Armenians dislocated or forced to flee abroad; and amnesty



for Armenian political prisoners. Still unwilling to turn away from the West, the Dashnakists insisted on a European high commissioner to oversee the reforms and a European-officered mixed Muslim-Christian gendarmerie.

On behalf of the powers and with the consent of the Sublime Porte, an official of the Russian embassy negotiated with the revolutionaries through the night of August 26. Tired, hungry, and discouraged by the death of Babgen Siuni in the initial assault, they agreed to end the siege and to be transferred with their personal weapons to an English yacht and from there to a French vessel and exile. In return, Armenian grievances would receive due consideration. Hence, without any guarantees except for another European vague assurance, the conspirators, having lost their charismatic leader and nine others killed or wounded, sailed away. Their mission had been successful only to the degree that it had alarmed the European powers. It brought no salutary step toward resolution of the Armenian question.

The most immediate outcome of the daring raid, memorialized in the popular revolutionary song "Bank Ottoman Gravads Eh Dashnaktsutian Komiten" (The Ottoman Bank Is Occupied by the Dashnakist Committee), was more bloodshed. As in the Hnchakist demonstrations at Kum Kapu, Bab Ali, and elsewhere, the Armenian stirrings in a repressive system led to increased victimization. Some observers accused the revolutionaries of intentionally provoking a Turkish overreaction. The contention was that the revolutionaries were willing to sacrifice a large number of Armenians in one stroke in order to save the rest by forcing the European powers to intervene. The difficulties associated with the Armenian question made such reasoning logical, but there is little hard evidence that the revolutionaries willingly set up their own people for slaughter. Nonetheless, massacre was the Turkish response to the Armenian seizure of the Ottoman Bank.

Even while Siuni's comrades still held the bank, police agents, some dressed as theological students, were organizing a mob, passing out clubs and iron bars. There were even reports that Abdul-Hamid's extensive espionage network had previously uncovered the plot but that the authorities allowed the bank to be taken in order to impress the Europeans with the murderous recklessness of Armenian terrorists and to rationalize the preceding pogroms. By nightfall on August 26, the armed mobs were attacking Armenian shops and any hapless Armenian in their way. A new orgy of clubbings, knifings, and mutilations was unleashed. Armenians indiscriminately were bludgeoned and hacked to

death in the quarters of Pera, Galata, Pangaldi, Tophane, Beshiktash, and Kassim Pasha and in the villages of the Bosphorus, including Bebek, Rumelihisar, Kandili, and Khaskoy. The massacre lasted for two days, claiming 6,000 lives and prompting thousands of panic-stricken Armenians to flee from the capital of the Ottoman Empire. The European protest notes deplored the abhorrent killings and pointed to evidence of the coordinated, organized nature of the massacre and the complicity of the authorities. As before, the response of the Sublime Porte was denial and subterfuge. And, as before, the massacres produced another half-hearted European reform scheme. The Europeans soon turned from the Armenian Question to other affairs (Nalbandian, 1963, pp. 176-78; Walker, 1980, pp. 164-68).

The European powers, for their own selfish reasons, needed the Ottoman Empire to survive, and this required reforms to eliminate the worst abuses. Yet mutual rivalries, jealousies, and suspicions, along with the unwillingness to use force, precluded the enactment of real changes. Meanwhile, Sultan Abdul-Hamid, desperate in his attempts to preserve the insufferable status quo, allowed his regime to degenerate into pogroms. While the period from 1894 to 1922 can be seen as a continuum of violent acts to eliminate the Armenian presence in the Ottoman Empire, the objectives of Abdul-Hamid in the 1890s were quite different from those of the Young Turks in 1915. The beleaguered sultan resorted to massacres in his futile efforts to maintain the old order, whereas the Young Turks perpetrated genocide to overturn the status quo and create a new order and a new frame of reference in which there was no place at all for Armenians.

### New Directions

Disappointment and disillusion weighed heavily upon the Armenians after 1896. The bloody retribution of Abdul-Hamid split the Hnchakian Party. Many members believed that Europe had turned its back on the Armenians because of the party's socialist ideology. They blamed Avetis Nazarbekian and the organs abroad for their provocative calls for insurrection, and they insisted on radical changes in strategy and structure. Socialist rhetoric should be dropped and instead the party should concentrate entirely on the nationalistic objective of emancipating Western Armenia. Attempts to reunify the party were unsuccessful, as the nationalist dissidents organized the Reformed Hnchakian Party. The

international socialist intellectuals continued to dominate the Hnchakian central organs and managed to retain the loyalty of many members in Cilicia, Sivas, Kaiseri, the Balkans, and elsewhere. The Reformed Hnchakists, on the other hand, gradually moved toward the right and eventually merged in 1921 with the Armenakans, Sahmandir Ramkavars, and other groups in the formation of the nonsocialist, liberal Ramkavar Azatakan (Democratic Liberal) Party. The internecine feuds weakened the Hnchakian movement and left the field open for the expansion of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation.

In the decade following the great pogroms, Armenian revolutionary activities were carried on by small guerrilla bands that roamed the Armenian mountains at Sasun, Mush, and Bitlis, continuing to strike officials, informers, and hostile tribal elements. The *fedayis* clustered around a charismatic leader, often known only by a first name and an honorific title, such as Hrair Dzhoghk, Serob Aghbiur, and Andranik Pasha. The daring feats of these bands won the sympathy and support of many inhabitants yet could not reverse the economic impoverishment of the peasantry and the continued exodus from the lands of historic Armenia.

In 1904, while Sasun was again in ferment and the Hamidiye Kurdish cavalry and Turkish regulars were engaged in punitive action, the third general congress of the Dashnaktsutun, meeting in Sofia, shifted attention from the evils of the system to the personal culpability of the sultan. Subscribing to the view that individuals do affect the course of history and that therefore the removal of despots could lead to a freer society, the Dashnaktsutun resolved to eliminate Sultan Abdul-Hamid II. Kristapor Mikayelian, a party founder and the chief conspirator, organized the plot in 1905. The scheme was ironically foiled by quirks of fate. Mikayelian was killed accidentally by the explosives intended for the sultan, and when his revolutionary companions subsequently proceeded with the plan, Abdul-Hamid survived unscathed. He had altered his normal Friday routine only slightly, yet the diversion was long enough to shield him from the massive explosion that demolished his waiting carriage and members of his retinue.

It was significant that men and women of different ethnic and religious origins had participated in the Yildiz palace assassination plot. The Dashnaktsutun had now associated with other societies struggling against the common oppressor. Antipathy to Abdul-Hamid was not an Armenian monopoly. In Geneva, Paris, and other émigré centers, reformists and revolutionaries of all the Ottoman nationalities conceived

programs of change. The Turkish groups, in discord on many details, shared the belief that the reigning sultan was the major source of affliction. Both Ahmed Riza and Murad Bey, leaders of rival elements of the so-called Young Turks, held that only efficient, just government could obviate the total disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. The Young Turks generally were modernists, but they were also patriots, rejecting regional autonomy as a solution to the empire's woes. The rightful demands of the Armenians, they insisted, could be satisfied not through self-rule or European intervention but by establishment of a properly functioning central government.

Opposition to Abdul-Hamid developed within the official structure of the empire itself, especially among the students and faculties of the technical institutes and the army officer class. These men, too, felt scandalized by the ruinous policies of the sultan and, like the Young Turks abroad, were motivated by nationalistic concepts. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, however, both internal and external foes of Abdul-Hamid were badly undermined by suppression within Turkey and effective espionage and propaganda abroad. Hamidian agents urged the Young Turks to return home, stressing that the desired reforms would never become reality as long as the attacks on the person and character of the monarch persisted. Cooperation, not defiance, was the avenue to change. Murad Bey and other Young Turks were swayed by the logic and returned to Constantinople, only to become bitterly disillusioned.

The faltering opposition movement received a strong boost in 1899, when Abdul-Hamid's brother-in-law and two nephews fled abroad. Prince Sabaheddin, one of the nephews, assumed a major role in the anti-Hamidian struggle. Before Sabaheddin's active involvement, the Armenian societies had been reluctant to collaborate with the Young Turk movement, particularly because of its negative stand regarding regional-national autonomy. But in February 1902 the Dashnaksutiun and Hnchakian parties, heartened by the conciliatory statements of Sabaheddin and desperate in their battle against Abdul-Hamid, did participate in the first Congress of Ottoman Liberals. Meeting in Sabaheddin's residence in Paris, the forty-seven delegates representing Turkish, Arab, Greek, Kurdish, Armenian, Albanian, Circassian, and Jewish groups entered into an entente against the sultan. The resolutions of the congress demanded equal rights for all Ottoman citizens, local self-administration, measures to defend the territorial integrity of the empire, and restoration of the constitution

that had been suspended since 1877. Yet even during this initial gathering, fundamental differences pulled the delegates into opposing factions. The adoption of an Armenian-sponsored resolution inviting the European powers to honor their obligations to the oppressed Ottoman peoples was roundly denounced by Ahmed Riza and other Turkish nationalists. Ahmed Riza berated Sabaheddin's support for the majority resolution and reasserted the contention that the Armenians needed neither European protectors nor a special status but could prosper, together with all other ethnic and religious elements, in the constitutional Turkey of the future. His view was crystallized in the exclamation "Autonomy is treason; it means separation!"

In the months after the Congress of Ottoman Liberals, Prince Sabaheddin organized the League of Administrative Decentralization and Private Initiative, cosmopolitan in principles and with the immediate objective of rousing individual citizens from apathy and instilling the will to resist tyranny. Having allowed the Ottoman homeland to slip into the grasp of despots, the "good people" were in fact responsible for the sad state of affairs. Administrative decentralization and the enhancement of interracial and interreligious harmony formed the bases of Sabaheddin's program. It was this idealistic goal of federation to which many Armenian leaders were attracted and in which they discerned the most promising solution to the Armenian question. But Sabaheddin's principles were not those that were to win out in Turkey.

Within the Ottoman Empire, meanwhile, army officers revived the anti-Hamidian current. Their secret circles, the most notable of which were in the corps headquartered at Salonika, combined with Ahmed Riza's faction abroad in 1907 to become a formal society, the *Ittihad ve Terakki Teshkilati* (Committee of Union and Progress). It was as the spokesman of this new group that Ahmed Riza attended the second Congress of Ottoman Liberals, held in Paris at the end of 1907. The meeting, which had been organized primarily on the initiative of the *Dashnaktsutun*, pledged its constituent societies to a united campaign to overthrow Abdul-Hamid's regime by the swiftest means possible, not excluding revolution, and to ensure the introduction of representative government.

Quite apart from the deliberations in Paris, events in the empire were already moving toward confrontation. When *Ittihadist* officers in Macedonia found themselves about to be exposed, they led their regiments toward Constantinople as a defensive measure and, as the mutiny spread, demanded implementation of the Ottoman constitution. Lacking

sufficient loyal troops to quell the insubordinate officers, Abdul-Hamid bowed to the ultimatum on July 24, 1908. The Armenians hailed the victory of the army and its Ittihadist commanders, and manifestations of Ottoman Christian and Muslim brotherhood abounded in the streets of the capital. A gust of optimism rustled into the remotest districts of the empire.

### The Young Turk Regime

Unfortunately for the Armenians, the new parliamentary regime was beset forthwith by deep domestic and international crises, for these contributed to the ultimate assertion of Turkish chauvinism over Ottoman liberalism. Capitalizing upon the upheavals of 1908, Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina outright, Bulgaria asserted full independence, and the Cretans declared union with Greece. The initial impact of these troubles emboldened the Turkish traditionalist elements to stage a counter-coup in April 1909. But the military again saved the situation, as the so-called Army of Deliverance marched swiftly into Constantinople and dispersed the forces of the reaction. Sultan Abdul-Hamid, who had become the rallying standard of the old vested interests, was deposed and exiled to Salonika. The turmoil did not abate, however, without renewed tragedy for the Armenians of Cilicia.

The historic region of Cilicia was divided in one of the later Ottoman administrative reorganizations into the province (*vilayet*) of Adana and the counties (*sanjaks*) of Marash, Aintab, and Alexandretta in the *vilayet* of Aleppo. The city of Adana lay at the center of a great alluvial plain that reached to the Gulf of Alexandretta on the Mediterranean Sea and to the feet of the Taurus and Amanus mountains, which protected such Armenian strongholds as Hadjin, Zeitun, and Musa Dag. Armenians had lived in Cilicia since antiquity, and it was here that the last Armenian principality and kingdom had existed between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. The region was mixed ethnographically and confessionally, with several distinct Christian and Muslim peoples. The Armenians played a major role in the crafts, commerce, and newly developing industry, availing themselves more than any other group of the educational opportunities provided by American and European schools at Adana, Tarsus, Aintab, Marash, and elsewhere.

After the Young Turk revolution, many Armenians were emboldened to believe that they could now enjoy freedom of speech and assembly. The audacious prelate of Adana, Bishop Mushegh,

expounded in nationalistic rhetoric, proclaiming that the centuries of Armenian servitude had passed and that it was now the right and duty of his people to learn to defend themselves, their families, and their communities. For Muslims, however, the new era of constitutional government undermined their traditional relationship with Armenians and threatened their legal and customary superiority. At the same time that Abdul-Hamid's partisans in Constantinople initiated the counter-coup to restore the authority of the sultan, conservatives of similar sentiments lashed out at the Armenians of Adana. A skirmish between Armenians and Turks on April 13 set off a riot that resulted in the pillaging of the bazaars and attacks upon the Armenian quarters. The violence also spread to nearby villages. When the authorities finally intervened two days later, more than 2,000 Armenians lay dead. An uneasy ten-day lull was broken on April 25 with an inferno. Army regulars who had just arrived in the city and who encountered Armenian resistance now joined the mobs. Fires set in the Armenian quarters spread rapidly in all directions. Armenian Protestants and Catholics, who had remained generally aloof from nationalistic movements, were not spared as the massacre and plunder fanned out over the width and breadth of Cilicia, extending all the way to Marash in the northeast and Kessab in the south. Hakob Papikian (Hagop Babigian), member of a parliamentary commission of investigation, reported that there had been 21,000 victims, of whom 19,479 were Armenian, 850 Syrian, 422 Chaldean, and 250 Greek (Papikian, 1909, p. 48). Thousands of widows and orphans now stood as a grim reminder of the first massacre of the Young Turk era. Several Turks and Armenians were hanged in Adana for provoking the violence, but the most responsible persons, including the governor and commandant, got off with no real punishment.

After the Young Turks regained control in Constantinople and sent Abdul-Hamid into exile, they ascribed the massacres to reactionaries and conducted a public memorial service for both Turkish and Armenian citizens who had sacrificed their lives "in defense of the revolution." They passed over in silence the fact that a number of Ittihadist supporters had participated in the carnage. Despite the Cilician massacres, the Dashnaktsutun remained loyal to its entente with the Young Turks. The party's fifth general congress in 1909 pledged continued support of the government and rejected any move toward separation. In September the Ittihadists and Dashnakists entered into a protocol of agreement to implement the constitution fully and to extend its guarantees to the provinces in order to avoid a repetition of the tragedy at Adana, to unite

against reactionary elements, and to counteract harmful rumors that the Armenians aspired to independence.

The agreement came at a time when the Ittihadist government had declared a state of siege and limited constitutional rights because of the attempted coup against it. The state of siege was not lifted in Constantinople for four years. During that period the minister of interior, Talaat Bey, enunciated his thesis that equality could be achieved only when the entire citizenry had become "Ottomanized." To Talaat, Ottomanization came to mean Turkification. By 1911, however, the undemocratic methods of the Ittihadist leaders had given rise to splinter groups. The Liberal Union (Ahrar firkasi), supported by Prince Sabaheddin, many non-Turkish groups, and most disgruntled Young Turk intellectuals, called for an end to the extraconstitutional regime and state of siege. The Ittihadists responded in the spring of 1912 by dissolving parliament and conducting a rigged, controlled election that gave them an overwhelming legislative majority. The maneuver did not pass unchallenged, as the military again moved in the name of the revolution. The so-called Savior Officers coerced the cabinet to resign and raised the prolonged state of siege. Moderate liberals, pledged to upholding the principles of the Young Turk revolution, dominated the cabinet for the rest of the year.

During the many crises from 1908 through 1912, the Dashnaktsutun stayed loyal to the constitutional regime. The party ordered its guerrilla forces to cease all oppositional activities and to disarm, and it campaigned actively in the parliamentary elections. After the 1909 massacres, the Dashnaktsutun was roundly criticized by the Hnchakists and others for continuing to collaborate with the Ittihadists. The Dashnaktsutun, at its sixth general congress in 1911, also chastised the Ittihadist leadership for retreating from the principles of constitutionalism and interracial collaboration and resolved to join the opposition groups unless the Young Turks mended their ways. Nonetheless, when the combined armies of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Montenegro invaded the last remaining Ottoman possessions in Europe in 1912, the Dashnaktsutun and Armenian leaders, such as Patriarch Hovhannes Arsharuni, exhorted the Armenian citizenry to patriotic endeavors and the Armenian units in the Ottoman army to valorous deeds. Andranik (Ozanian) and other *fedayis* broke with their party and organized volunteer detachments in the Bulgarian army.

The victory of the Balkan states, their occupation of Macedonia and much of Thrace, and their demand for extensive territorial concessions, including Adrianople, weakened the moderate Turkish cabinet



and culminated in an Ittihadist restoration. In a coup directed by Enver Bey in January 1913, one cabinet minister was assassinated and the grand vizier was compelled to tender his resignation. The Ittihadist ultranationalists had gained ascendancy. From that juncture until the end of World War I, the policies of the Ottoman Empire were to be formulated by a clique headed by Minister of War Enver, Minister of Interior Talaat, and Military Governor of Constantinople, subsequently Minister of the Marine, Jemal.

### The Final Reform Plan

Armenian political societies enjoyed a semilegal status between 1908 and 1915. They maintained party clubs and newspapers and vied for the parliamentary seats allotted to the Armenians. Yet these privileges in the post-Hamidian period did little to diminish the hardships of the rural population. Predatory bands in the eastern provinces could not be controlled by legislative decree. The threats to life and property became greater still when several thousand Armenian youth, subject under the constitutional regime to conscription, were sent off to the Balkan front. The European consuls filled their dispatches with descriptions of the widespread anarchy. In Constantinople the petitions of the patriarch were answered with promises of action, but improvements did not follow. Armenophiles the world over again urged European intervention. By 1912 those cries no longer fell on deaf ears. The tsar of Russia, after a calculated silence of fifteen years, now proclaimed his profound concern for the wretched Armenians of the Turkish empire.

Although the ruling classes of Imperial Russia regarded the Armenian political societies with no less anxiety and loathing than had Sultan Abdul-Hamid, both domestic and external considerations motivated Tsar Nicholas II to speak out. Most of his 2 million Armenian subjects had been alienated by the ill-advised attempts to russify the minorities of the empire and by specific Armenophobe measures of tsarist functionaries in Transcaucasia. The upheavals in the Caucasus between 1903 and 1907 had clearly demonstrated that the disaffection had permeated every level of Armenian society. But Tsar Nicholas, who had managed to stay on the throne during the empire-wide Russian revolution of 1905, could regain Armenian loyalties by centering attention on the Turkish Armenian cause, a cause dear to many Russian Armenians. The imperial counselors believed, moreover, that the aggravations in Western Armenia could easily

lead to a rebellion, which might then sweep into Transcaucasia. Influenced by these factors, the Russian government eased Armenian press censorship and actually encouraged the Eastern Armenians to engross themselves in the Western Armenian problem and to organize committees to enlist the support of official European opinion.

Russia's interests in the Middle East also figured in the decision to resuscitate the Armenian question on the international level. In 1907 Russia and Great Britain had arrived at a limited agreement that divided Persia into zones of influence, with most northern districts included in the Russian sphere. For Russia to consolidate its Persian gains and perhaps even to extend its zones, peace in the Caucasus and in adjoining Western Armenia was essential. Furthermore, the increasing sway of Germany in Ottoman economic and military affairs alarmed the Russian strategists. The possibility that the very provinces facing the Caucasus might become Kaiser Wilhelm II's outposts was in itself sufficient cause for Russia to advocate a reform measure that could serve to block German expansionism into Western Armenia.

Uplifted to unprecedented optimism by the most recent expressions of international concern and taking into consideration the fact that the European powers had already placed controls on several departments of the Ottoman government, Armenian patriarchal circles in Constantinople prepared statistical data and memoranda for use by the proponents of reform. A commission of the Armenian National Assembly examined the patriarchal archives, tax ledgers, and parish reports to demonstrate that, despite decades of massacre and persecution, the Armenians still formed a plurality in their historic homelands.

European travelers and scholars in the mid-nineteenth century had given the number of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as 2,500,000, and the Armenian Patriarchate in 1882 showed 2,660,000. According to the statistics of 1912, however, there were only 2,100,000, the 500,000 decrease presumably being the result of the massacres of 1894 to 1896 and 1909 as well as the continued Armenian exodus to the Caucasus, Europe, and the United States. The 2,100,000 Armenians in 1912 were distributed as follows:

The six provinces of Turkish Armenia	1,018,000
Peripheral areas of the six provinces	145,000
Cilicia	407,000
Western Anatolia and European Turkey	530,000
(Armenian Delegation, 1919, pp. 44-46)	

The peripheral areas that the Armenians excluded from the core region of Western Armenia were largely Muslim populated and had become a part of the six provinces through nineteenth-century provincial reforms. Armenian political leaders regarded the changes as gerrymandering for the purpose of decreasing the overall proportion of Armenians in the six provinces commonly referred to as Turkish Armenia. The patriarchal statistics showed that in the core region, Armenians formed 38.9 percent of the population, with Turks 25.4 percent, and Kurds 16.3 percent. In a provincial breakdown, the Armenians numbered as follows: Erzerum, 215,000; Van, 185,000; Bitlis, 180,000; Kharput, 168,000; Sivas, 165,000; Diarbekir, 105,000. The Christian element, which also included Nestorians and Greeks, formed a plurality of 45.2 percent. In advancing these figures, the Armenians themselves could be charged with manipulation, since they excluded part of the Kurdish-populated southern *sanjaks* and the Turkish-populated western *sanjaks* and established a Christian plurality only by placing heterodox Muslims such as the Kizilbash in the category of "other religions." In sharp contrast to the patriarchate's statistics, the Ottoman government claimed that there were only 1,295,000 Armenians (7 percent) of the total population in the empire and that in the six eastern provinces their number was 660,000 (17 percent) compared with 3 million Muslims (Turkey, 1919, p. 7).

After the Ittihadist coup of January 1913, members of the party's central committee, usually Talaat and Midhat Shukri, met several times with Dashnakist spokesmen Armen Garo (Garegin Pasdermadjian), Vartkes (Hovhannes Serenkiulian), and Aknuni (Khachatur Malumian) to urge the most influential Armenian society to steer the patriarchate as well as all national aspirations away from dependence on foreign governments. Talaat warned his close Armenian acquaintances, two of whom were deputies in the Ottoman parliament, that their people had fallen under the sinister spell of the Europeans, the true enemies of Turks and Armenians alike. But the rift between the Ittihad ve Terakki and the Dashnaktsutun had become so deep by 1913 that the Armenian leaders were convinced that without external intercession, the collective future of the Western Armenians would remain bleak.

Acting under this premise, the Armenian National Assembly prepared what it regarded to be a workable reform program and presented the draft to André Mandelstam, the Armenophile chief dragoman of the Russian embassy. The main provisions of the plan were later incorporated into a Russian scheme, which was relayed in mid-1913 to the

embassies of Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. Russia's action drew sharp German protests, and soon the six major powers of Europe were again entangled. Though German ambassador Hans von Wangenheim, bolstered by his colleagues of the Triple Alliance, strongly objected to Russian intervention, he was compelled to accept the proposal that the six ambassadors at Constantinople discuss the question. The summer residence of the Austrian ambassador became the usual site for the meetings. There, in June and July, the six ambassadors and their appointed commission haggled over the Russian plan, which included:

1. Unification of the six Armenian *vilayets*, with the exclusion of certain peripheral districts, into a single province.
2. Selection of an Ottoman Christian or European governor for the province.
3. Creation of an administrative council and a provincial assembly consisting of both Muslim and Christian elements.
4. Formation of a mixed Muslim-Christian gendarmerie commanded by European officers in Turkish service.
5. Dissolution of the Hamidiye Kurdish cavalry units.
6. Publication of official decrees in Turkish, Kurdish, and Armenian, with the right to use those languages in legal proceedings.
7. Extension of the franchise only to sedentary elements.
8. Permission for each nationality to establish and administer private schools for which special taxes might be levied on members of that community.
9. Selection of a special commission to investigate the extent of Armenian losses caused by usurpation and to supervise restitution in the form of currency or land.
10. Exclusion from the province of Muslim refugee-immigrants (*muhajirs*).
11. Institution of similar improvements outside the province for areas inhabited by Armenians, particularly Cilicia.
12. Obligation of the European powers to ensure the enactment of the program. (Mandelstam, 1917, pp. 218-22; Hovannisian, 1967, pp. 30-33)

The Ottoman government, excluded from the preliminary negotiations, attempted to counter the Russian project by declaring general reform measures for the entire empire. The Turkish maneuver was

rejected by the representatives of the Franco-Russo-British Entente, who were, however, unable to convince the ambassadors of the Triple Alliance to accede to the Russian proposals. Because of the stalemate, Russian ambassador M. N. de Giers for the Entente and von Wangenheim for the Triple Alliance agreed to continue talks, which lasted throughout the remainder of 1913. At last, after numerous impasses and the exchange of voluminous correspondence between the Constantinople embassies and their respective foreign ministries, a Russo-German compromise was attained, which, with several modifications, was accepted under duress by the Turkish government as the Reform Act of February 8, 1914.

The final accord, though sanctioned by all six European nations, was signed only by Ottoman Grand Vizier and Foreign Minister Said Halim and Russian chargé d'affaires K. N. Gulkevich, acting in the absence of Ambassador de Giers. Among the numerous modifications of the original Russian plan was the creation of two Armenian provinces, one incorporating the Trebizond, Sivas, and Erzerum *vilayets* and the other the Van, Bitlis, Kharput, and Diarbekir *vilayets*. A foreign inspector-general, the supreme civil authority, was to be selected for each province. The division of Western Armenia into two separate areas and the reduction of the Armenian proportional strength by the inclusion of all peripheral areas as well as the Trebizond *vilayet* were obvious concessions to the Ottoman government. Moreover, no mention was made of restitution for Armenian losses, the exclusion of *muhajirs*, the extension of the reform measure to Armenians living beyond the two inspectorates, or the obligation of the European powers to guarantee the execution of the program. While the terms "Armenian" and "Christian" were used repeatedly in the original Russian project, neither was employed in the compromise settlement. Instead, "ethnic elements" and "non-Muslims" were substituted as an additional concession to the Ittihadist rulers. The agreement did not formally pertain to "Turkish Armenia" but rather to "Eastern Anatolia." Although the act of February 1914 did not fulfill all Armenian expectations, it did represent the most viable reform proposed since the internationalization of the Armenian Question in 1878.

Once the compromise settlement had been adopted, the governments of the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente initiated a new round of negotiations to determine of what nationality and personality the two inspectors-general should be. The men who ultimately gained the approval of all parties concerned were Major Nicolai Hoff,

secretary-general in the ministry of war of Norway, and Louis Westenek of the Netherlands, formerly assistant resident in the Dutch East Indies. By the summer of 1914 Hoff (promoted to lieutenant colonel) was in Van, the administrative center of one of the Armenian inspectorates, and Westenek was in Constantinople preparing to depart for his post at Erzerum.

It was a moment of great optimism for the Armenians. Their long and extremely costly struggle for civil rights and regional autonomy verged on fruition. In due course, the Armenian question might be consigned to history. Ironically, however, it was the Ittihadist dictators of the Ottoman Empire who planned to consign the matter to history just a few months later by sweeping the Western Armenians, through deportation and massacre, from their homelands of three millennia. The most tragic and traumatic event in the long and turbulent history of the Armenian people was to unfold during the Great War.

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